

# *Documents on Diplomacy: Resources*

## *Taft Speech on the North Atlantic Treaty, July 26, 1949*

... Why did I vote against the Atlantic Pact? I wanted to vote for it—at least I wanted to vote to let Russia know that if she attacked western Europe, the United States would be in the war. I believe that would be a deterrent to war... We issued just this warning in the Monroe Doctrine, and though we were a much less powerful nation, it prevented aggression against Central and South America. That was only a President's message to Congress, and there were no treaty obligations, and no arms for other nations. But it was one of the most effective peace measures in the history of the world. I would favor a Monroe Doctrine for western Europe.

But the Atlantic Pact goes much further. It obligates us to go to war if at any time during the next 20 years anyone makes an armed attack on any of the 12 nations. Under the Monroe Doctrine we could change our policy at any time. We could judge whether perhaps one of the countries had given cause for the attack. Only Congress could declare a war in pursuance of the doctrine. Under the new pact the President can take us into war without Congress. But, above all the treaty is a part of a much larger program by which we arm all these nations against Russia... A joint military program has already been made. . . It thus becomes an offensive and defensive military alliance against Russia. I believe our foreign policy should be aimed primarily at security and peace, and I believe such an alliance is more likely to produce war than peace. A third world war would be the greatest tragedy the world has ever suffered. Even if we won the war, we this time would probably suffer tremendous destruction, our economic system would be crippled, and we would lose our liberties and free system just as the Second World War destroyed the free systems of Europe. It might easily destroy civilization on this earth. . .

There is another consideration. If we undertake to arm all the nations around Russia from Norway on the north to Turkey on the south, and Russia sees itself ringed about gradually by so-called defensive arms from Norway and Denmark to Turkey and Greece, it may form a different opinion. It may decide that the arming of western Europe, regardless of its present purpose, looks to an attack upon Russia. Its view may be unreasonable, and I think it is. But from the Russian standpoint it may not seem unreasonable. They may well decide that if war is the certain result, that war might better occur now rather than after the arming of Europe is completed. . .

How would we feel if Russia undertook to arm a country on our border; Mexico, for instance?

Furthermore, can we afford this new project of foreign assistance? I think I am as much against Communist aggression as anyone, both at home and abroad; certainly more than a State Department which has let the Communists overrun all of China. . . But we can't let them scare us into bankruptcy and the surrender of all liberty, or let them determine our foreign policies. We are already spending \$15,000,000,000 on our armed forces and have the most powerful Air Force in the world and the only atomic bomb. That, and our determination to go to war if Europe is attacked, ought to be sufficient to deter an attack by armed force.

We are spending \$7,000,000,000 a year on economic aid to build up those countries to a condition of prosperity where communism cannot make internal progress. Shall we start another project whose cost is incalculable, at the very time when we have a deficit of 1,800,000,000 dollars and a prospective deficit of three to five billion? The one essential defense against communism is to keep this country financially and economically sound. If the President is unwilling to recommend more taxes for fear of creating a depression, then we must have reached the limit of our taxpaying ability and we ought not to start a new and unnecessary building project. . .

But, finally, I believe there is only one real hope of peace in the world to come—an association of nations binding itself to abide by a law governing nations and administered by a court of legal justice. Such a judicial finding must not be subject to veto by any nation and there must be an international force to enforce the court's decree. Such a plan can only succeed if the public opinion of the world is educated to insist on the enforcement of justice.

The United Nations looks in this direction but it can be improved and should be. This pact might have set up such a system between the nations of western Europe. It unfortunately did not do so. We should undertake to make it a model to which the United Nations may later conform. But as set up, it is a step backward—a military alliance of the old type where we have to come to each others' assistance no matter who is to blame, and with ourselves the judges of the law.

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